

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BRUSSE 05727 222153Z
ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5639
INFO ALL EC CAPITALS
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM
USMISSION GENEVA

UNCLAS BRUSSELS 05727

USEEC, PARIS ALSO FOR USOECD

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: EEC, ELAB
SUBJ: EC COUNCIL'S STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT
DISCUSSES "WORK-SHARING"

REF: BRUSSELS 3423

1. EC COUNCIL'S STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT--A
TRIPARTITE GROUP MADE UP OF THE EC NINE'S LABOR MINISTERS,
EC COMMISSION VICE PRESIDENT VREDELING, AND LABOR AND
MANAGEMENT LEADERS DRAWN FROM MEMBER COUNTRIES AND FROM
THEIR COMMUNITY-LEVEL ORGANIZATIONS--MET FOR A FULL DAY
MARCH 21 TO DISCUSS THE WISDOM OF "WORK SHARING A
SHORTHAND TERM FOR VARIOUS WAYS OF REDISTRIBUTING SOME
OF THE WORKING TIME OF EMPLOYED PERSONS TO THOSE NOW
UNEMPLOYED. AS EXPECTED, THE COMMITTEE DID NOT AGREE ON
ANY SPECIFIC WORK-SHARING FORMULAS, BUT DID ENDORSE "THE
GENERAL AIM OF REDUCING THE ANNUAL NUMBER OF WORKING HOURS
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PAGE 02 BRUSSE 05727 222153Z

PER MAN," WITH THE PROVISIO THAT THIS AIM BE PURSUED WITHIN
MEMBER STATES AS SEEN FIT BY THEIR OWN LABOR
AND MANAGEMENT REPRESENTATIVES.

2. THIS WAS SOMEWHAT SHORT OF THE HOPES OF THE 24 LABOR
LEADERS PRESENT (21 OF THEM FROM THE EUROPEAN TRADE UNION
CONFEDERATION, THE OTHER THREE FROM THE FRENCH CGT, CFTC,

AND CGC). IN A PRESS CONFERENCE AFTER THE CLOSED MEETING, ETUC VICE PRESIDENT GEORGES DEBUNNE OF BELGIUM SAID HE WAS BOTH "SATISFIED AND DISAPPOINTED" WITH THE MEETING--SATISFIED BECAUSE EMPLOYERS "HAVEN'T CLOSED THE DOOR" ON WORK-SHARING, BUT DISAPPOINTED BECAUSE THE GROUP HAD NOT MADE A FIRM COMMITMENT TO AN EC-WIDE PURSUIT OF WORK-SHARING.

3. THE DISCUSSION PAPER FOR THE GROUP WAS ONE DRAWN UP RECENTLY BY THE EC COMMISSION'S SOCIAL AFFAIRS DIRECTOR-ATE AND RELEASED BY THE COMMISSION ON FEB. 22 (REFTEL). SPEAKERS COVERED MUCH THE SAME GROUND AS THE PAPER, EXCEPT THAT EMPLOYERS EMPHASIZED THE PROBLEMS INVOLVED, INCLUDING ADDED COSTS. AS A PRESS SUMMARY ISSUED BY THE COMMITTEE'S CHAIRMAN, LABOR MINISTER SVEND AUKEN OF DENMARK, PUT IT, THE EMPLOYERS DREW ATTENTION TO "THE IMPORTANCE OF AVOIDING HASTY CONCLUSIONS AND STRESSED THAT IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO GIVE VERY THOROUGH CONSIDERATION TO THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE MEASURES PROPOSED FOR THE ECONOMY, AND FOR THE WAYS IN WHICH COMPANIES WORKED, AT SECTORAL, NATIONAL, COMMUNITY, AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS."

4. GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES, THE PRESS SUMMARY ADDED, ALSO EMPHASIZED THAT "BOTH SIDES OF INDUSTRY HAD TO PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE"--IMPLYING THAT WORK-SHARING
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PAGE 03 BRUSSE 05727 222153Z

COULD NOT BE FORCED UPON EMPLOYERS. SEVERAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES POINTED OUT THAT THEIR COUNTRIES HAD ALREADY ADOPTED SOME WORK-SHARING MEASURES, E.G., A BAN ON OVERTIME IN LUXEMBOURG.

5. COMMISSION OFFICIALS HAD HOPED THAT THE COMMITTEE WOULD APPROVE ITS DISCUSSION PAPER, AND GIVE A GREEN LIGHT TO DEVELOPING A POSSIBLE "COMMUNITY FRAMEWORK" ON WORK-SHARING AND TO UNDERTAKING FEASIBILITY STUDIES ON SPECIFIC KINDS OF WORK-SHARING METHODS. AFTER THE MEETING, A COMMISSION STAFFER, ASKED WHERE THE COMMISSION'S WORK NOW STOOD IN THIS AREA, SAID, "FRANKLY, I DON'T KNOW. WE'LL HAVE TO DO A POST-MORTEM."

6. COPIES OF THE COUNCIL'S PRESS SUMMARY ARE BEING AIRPOUCHED TO EUR:LABOR (GOOTT) AND THE LABOR DEPARTMENT: ILAB (HOLMES). MORRIS

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